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"fluid"

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**Rochester Institute of Technology  
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
Imaging Art Graduate Program**

**Written Thesis  
Jill Galloway**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree

***“fluid”***

February 2002

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Date

2/22/02  
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fig. 1

...FLUID

**Jill Galloway/Master of Fine Art Thesis/**

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

FEBRUARY 21, 2002



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## PREFACE

To achieve an understanding of visual art it is important to question both the artwork and the artist's intentions. Interpretation by the artist is not always more privileged than that of the viewer. Many times the artist's intention in creating the artwork is based solely on eliciting viewers' reactions and compelling the audience to complete the creative act. A personal interpretation of a photograph or a sculpture is created when a viewer observes and forms thoughts and emotions. Visual art does not always need to be explained through the words of the artist. In the work I create I am specifically interested in aiding the viewer in a conversation between themselves and the artwork. Observing the visual artwork, a conversation occurs where the viewer must ask and answer questions about the abstract photographs and then draw their own conclusions. However, the artist has control in the combining the art pieces and the installation to guide the viewer towards one type of understanding.

Installation and abstraction, key elements in visual art, shape the audience's interaction and perception. The artist has more control over the viewers' perception of the work when installation is used thoughtfully. The display of the work, room design, and arrangement effects how something is interpreted. In using abstraction; "expressing or naming a quality, idea or other concept, rather than a particular object or concrete thing<sup>1</sup>" the artist uses visual aids in guiding the viewer. Using a macro lens I am able to manipulate how objects appear through the camera. I use the characteristics of certain objects to obtain images that look as if they could be biological images through abstraction.

The power of art is speaking its own language. Feeling challenged at times by communicating ideas through language; the visual artist can provide a new kind of language, where forms are physically created containing imagery

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<sup>1</sup> *The World Book Dictionary*

that develops its own definition or story. Through introspection and time to study the different elements of the artwork, the artist recognizes the importance of the journey in creating art.

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## THESIS INSTALLATION

The experience begins in the parking lot of building 100 at Meridian Centre on Winton Road. Entering the corporate building, a large skylight illuminates the entranceway directing you towards the elevators. The building is the dwelling for several different offices, ranging from Strong Optics Lab to a temp agency. It feels very sterile, more like going to a doctor's office or a financial consultant than an art space. The gallery is located on the third floor. After stepping off the elevator there is a sign to assist in locating the offices and "studio". One must then meander down the doorless corridor to find a hallway in which the studio is located at the very end. At the end of the long hallway lit by florescent lights, you have reached the studio. There is signage up at the entrance: "Jim Johnson, *5 photographs*; Nathan Sherman, *Practices in seeing*; Jill Galloway, *fluid*." As one passes through a glass door, immediately eyes need to adjust to the dimly lit space.

The first room is an installation done by Jim Johnson. Five black squares line the wall. The black squares look like mirrors reflecting the limited light of the room. The color temperatures of the lights cause a cool and calming response to the space. Upon walking up to the squares you can then see glowing images behind the glass. The images lit behind the glass play



fig. 2

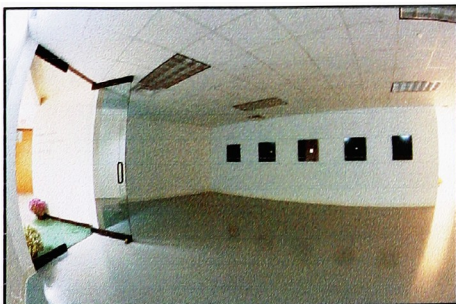


fig. 3

with perspective and space because they look as if they are hovering deep within the glass. Examining each of the five images creates a feeling of voyeurism as one looks into another person's private space. At the end of this wall a warmer light leaks out from the next room.

The room is arranged with framed images on the wall and a carpeted area with several pieces of furniture. There are several plants that decorate the room. Along with the furniture and a desk in the corner there are books and magazines creating the feel of a “waiting room.” The framed photographs, by Nathan Sherman, that line the wall are decoration, although the spotlights



fig. 4



fig. 5

that illuminate the images cause you to take more time to view the photos. The framed photographs are interesting and pleasing to look at however, not the main focus of the room. While standing in this space, the viewer becomes aware that there is yet another room on the other side of the wall.

There are two glass windows, set in the middle of the “waiting room,” reminiscent of a fish tank, which allow the viewer to see into the next room. However, in this “tank,” there are four pedestals that hold jars filled with liquid. They are brightly lit so that the observer can view the secluded specimens from the “waiting room.” The specimens, displayed as beautiful objects,



fig. 6

entice the viewer to come closer, observe, and study what is inside. The sculptures are there to lure the audience to take notice of this tank as well as to see into the next room creating a desire to enter the space on the other side of the wall. At the left end of this wall there is a step up into a dark hallway.



fig. 7

Spaced evenly along the floor are five photographic images that are lit from below. The 20"x20" red and white images on the floor illuminate the dark hallway. The subjects of the photographs are



fig. 8



unrecognizable. They look like studies of particles floating in liquid encased below the surface. There are three images down the first leg of the hallway and after turning right there are two. At the end of the hallway the viewer enters a clean and white open space.



fig. 9

This area is the final room, a sterile looking environment with white walls and soft white lights. The lights that illuminate the room are spotlights on the seven images around the room. There is also a cabinet that has its own light source within the structure. The space in the center of the room allows the viewer to take in the surroundings, noticing the windows with the encased specimens that look back through to the “waiting room.”

When stepping into the room you notice a silver and white cabinet that illuminates four photographic images. The back lit photographs are encased between two pieces of Plexiglas. The 5"x7"x1" red and

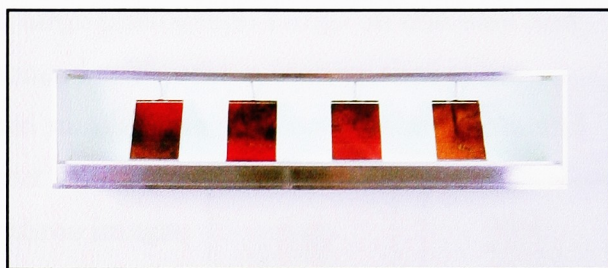


fig. 10

orange images are suspended by metal springs that cause the block to tilt

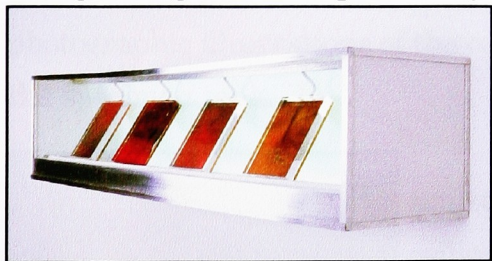


fig. 11

toward the backside of the cabinet. The images in the Plexiglas appear to be the same subject as the floor pieces in the hallway. The colors are similar, however, they are a more detailed and abstract view than those in the

toward the backside of the cabinet. The images in the Plexiglas appear to be the same subject as the floor pieces in the hallway. The colors are similar, however, they are a more detailed and abstract view than those in the

hallway. Photographs framed on the wall directly across from the specimen room contain colors similar to those of the four images in the cabinet. The same red that is in the floor pieces and in the cabinet images is used again in two of these framed photographs on the wall. These photographs mimic the soft focus and the smoothness of color paintings. The three photographs on the wall look like

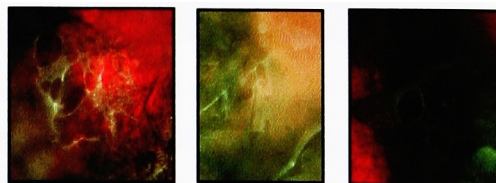


fig. 12



they are another examination of the same subject. The viewer is unable to decipher what the subject of the photograph is within the image, leaving the interpretation of up to the viewer. The images are created specifically to be ambiguous so that the viewer is forced to draw their own conclusions.

One photograph is hung alone on the wall across from the cabinet. The colors in the image are mainly a soft red and deep blue. The subject is different from the previous images. The photograph has air bubbles in it and the texture looks somewhat like ice,

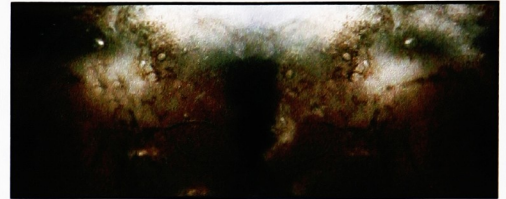


fig. 13



fig. 14

which helps the viewer connect the image to liquid. Seemingly grounds the viewer in reality.

In the corner adjacent to the specimen tank there are three images. One large photograph hangs on one wall and looks like an odd shaped cell<sup>2</sup>, with a texture that is not apparent in any other photograph. The two smaller images have similar colors and look like they are studies of the same subject taken from different angles. The colors in these three images are yellows and oranges. They are framed and sit on glass shelves giving them an object appeal. They are photographic illustrations of the sculptures encased in the specimen tank.



fig. 15



fig. 16



fig. 17

Between the windows are four pedestals with sculptures lit by a spotlight that hangs down from the ceiling. Each of the four jars are filled with clear liquid and different objects.

Three of the containers have objects that hover in



fig. 18

the center. They look like growths or specimens that have been contained and monitored in the specimen tank. The sculptures within the vitrines are minimal in color, the egg shapes are translucent with white and yellow

<sup>2</sup> See cover image

objects floating within them. One bottle contained hair that floats from the top to the bottom of the container.

The installation was to be seen as a whole, the experience from entering the “waiting room” all the way through to viewing the third space is just as important as studying each individual photograph or sculpture. Forcing the viewer to absorb all that was in the space was an important part of the thesis show. Through the use of abstract imagery and display the viewer was lead to believe that the installation is a biological experiment. The work relied on the experiences and knowledge of the viewer to create an explanation for what the images represented. However, the artist led them towards one kind of interpretation through the use of installation and display of the photographs and sculptures. The work was comprised of pieces, which relied on one another to create a whole; the experience of all of them together strengthened the idea of studies of the biological.

## Introduction

Art is a product of choices made from previous work. Through critique and reflection, an understanding is reached which clarifies the direction of the next piece. Questions are answered about how size, presentation, materials and subject matter have lead into the next photographic image or sculpture. In the process of making artwork there has always been satisfaction in working intuitively. There is a sense of comfort not knowing where the art will go when beginning a new body of work. Creating “fluid”, my thesis show, has been a journey that began about 6 years ago. It is important to see the progression of images and ideas that have led to the most recent artwork because when working intuitively, direct connections are not drawn from one group of work to another until the work has been thoughtfully examined. Conscious and subconscious choices are made as part of the work itself and at this point the artist and the artwork can not be separated. The work, the artist and the journey become one thing, tied together through self-critique.



## HISTORY

My undergraduate thesis show at Hartwick College consisted of an installation of fake-fur, fabric, wire and photographs. The goal was to expand on beauty and uncertainty through the camera and manual manipulation of material, as well as combining two and three dimensions. Interested in how the viewer

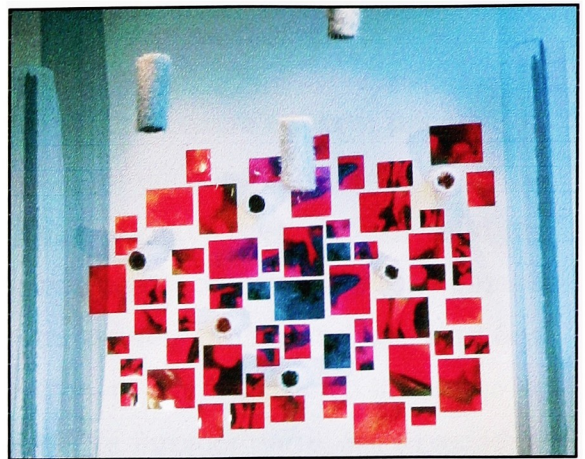


fig. 19



fig. 20

would experience the artwork, an installation of mixed media was created. The artwork was arranged to overwhelm and invite the viewer to interact with the installation. When entering the gallery, various sized photographs lined the wall like large blocks of color. The photos were randomly lined on the wall fading from one color photograph into the next. There were also circular tubes hanging down from the ceiling as well as protruding out from the wall. From a distance the installation dealt with color and shape, however, when moving closer to the wall the viewer could see that some photographs were not just fields of color but actually had texture within them. The colors in the photographs were brilliant and appealing, however texture added an element of discomfort. It was hard to figure out if the texture within the photograph was the same synthetic fur as in the sculpture. This occurred because of the color and perspective shifted within the image. The viewer was challenged by the inability to recognize what the source of information was within the photographs. The photographs presented a sense of uncertainty causing the viewers to create their own interpreta-

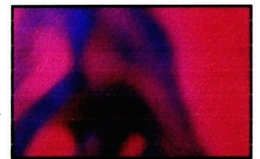


fig. 21

tion of what the photos represented. The installation became more effective by using the two mediums together because the sculptures invited physical interaction. Touching the sculptures helped to answer what the photographs were since the synthetic fur was used in both the photos and around the tube sculptures. Interest in how the viewer interacted with the work as well as how to guide the viewer towards one type of interpretation were two areas that I wanted to continue in creating new art work.

After graduating from Hartwick I had the opportunity to stay and work in the art department for a year as an intern and assistant photo teacher. I was fortunate to be allowed to keep my studio in the sculpture area, routinely show my work, and had critiques with my professors. By the end of the year I had been accepted into graduate school and moved from Oneonta, my home for five years and returned to Rochester where I had grown up. Back in my parents home, no longer having access to the sculpture studio, I began searching my new/old surrounding for something interesting to photograph. Adapting to a new routine I became interested in photographing the television. The television seemed to always be on, a change from Oneonta where I had no television. Through intuition and the quest for creating interesting images, I discovered a way of altering the light from the television. Adding an extension tube to the lens of the camera, I was able to change the television's image to an extremely out of focus picture. Again focusing on abstraction and color, the light from the television became my subject I began creating work unsure of where it would go. Through my camera I saw a glow of color that looked nothing like what one expects to see when looking at a television, rather it was reduced to a continually changing color orb. The discrepancy between the source of information and the photograph printed was fascinating to me. The photographs visually suggested the interaction of color and form. I was beginning to question how truthful photographs were. Without the viewer knowing the source, they were left with their own imagination as to what was in front of my camera. The viewer could then take an active part in search for the subject of the photograph relying



on imagination and experience. I continued to work with color photographs, abstracting things to force the viewer to use imagination in creating an interpretation.

For my first walk-through I displayed two grids, one 96"x80" consisting of 24 photographs and the other was a 80"x60" mounted grid of 15 color photo-

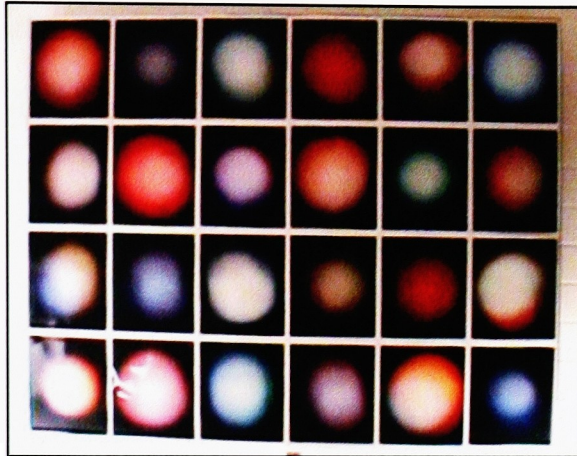


fig. 22

graphs. The larger grid consisted of photographs of spots of color. While the photographs which comprised of the smaller grid were forms that filled the frame. The photographs on the smaller grid were arranged so that the eye would flow from one photograph to the next, creating one large image.

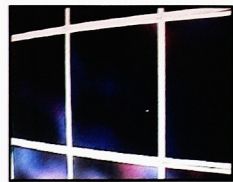


fig. 24

The goal of this walk-through was to display the television photographs so they interacted with one another creating a new view. The format of the photograph, together with the shape of the grid, replicated the shape of the television, the only visual clue back to the photograph's source of information. I was interested in how the photographs changed when shown as a group rather than as single independent images. The individual photograph was not successful in creating a strong reaction in the viewer; rather the images needed to play off one another to work effectively.

This work was well received by the faculty however, I saw an opportunity to push the abstract quality further in this work. My intention then became to guide the viewer towards a different perception of my abstract photographs. Deduction, as well as the mystery of the source of the nonrepresentational photographs intrigued me, and so I continued to use the television as my subject of

fig. 23



fig. 23

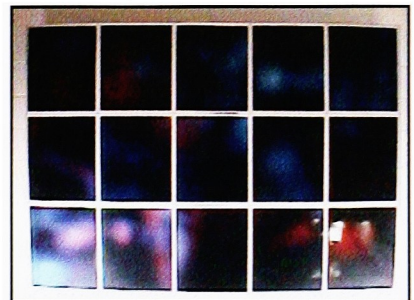


fig. 25

light and color in the next part of my journey.

In the second term walk-through I presented three 30"x40" photographic prints that hung in a dark studio illuminated by spotlights. The goal was for the images to possess a quality that could hold the viewer's attention because of the seductive color and form as well as cause them to draw on the imagination. The photographic images, which seemed to be forms that could exist in the "real



fig. 26



fig. 27



fig. 28

world," challenged the viewer's natural way of perceiving because the source was the out of focus light of the television.

Interested in continuing to photograph the same subject, I experi-

mented with different ways of shooting, manipulating the images on the computer and concerning myself with display. Using light as the only source of information in the photographs, I was able to capture a form that looked as though it could be at the beginning stages of life. The photographs referenced the notion of bio-morphic or embryonic-like states through form and color. The images visually hinted at cells splitting or the shape of an embryo while still containing mystery as to where this information came from. The display of the work was an important aspect of how the viewer was affected by the image. The prints were large, enveloping the viewer and illuminated by dramatic lighting where the area surrounding the photographs faded away allowing the viewer to become mesmerized by the forms.

For the final walk-through I built three 24"x40" light boxes. The

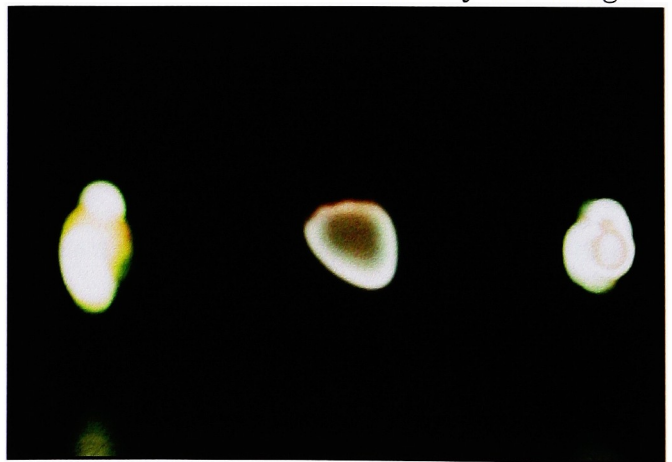


fig. 29



light from the Duratrans photographs illuminated only a small portion of the studio. The viewers surrounding became less important because the glowing images had a soothing affect. Along with the light boxes, five specimen like photographic images were presented that combined the shape from the television image with fur to provide texture. This work was yet another investigation of the same subject in which I created objects, photographic images that suggested a biological existence. I chose to focus on the sense of life the photographs contained. I wanted the images to physically glow as a reference to their original source, a television. These color-filled transmitted images were a natural progression from my earlier photography and installations. They further emphasized simple, organic-like forms, reminiscent of evolving stages of early life.

The use of the synthetic textured fur was a way to cause the images to have a new sense of life. This was an important experiment for the development

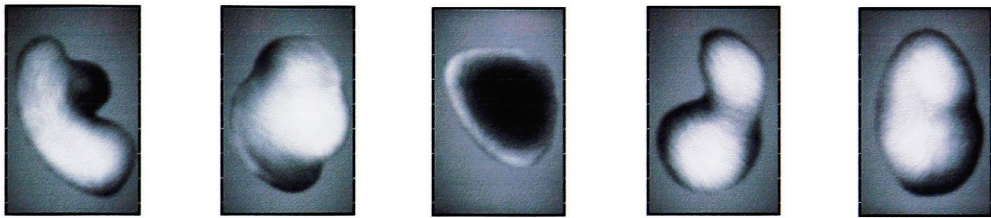


fig. 30

of the photographs because they no longer relied solely on the shape but now there was texture to aid the viewer in how to think about the photograph. The texture provided a living quality to the images that further enhanced the idea of the biological. The synthetic fur used along with the shape of the previous images combined elements of pleasure and uneasiness. The smooth shapes and soft fur were aesthetically beautiful but the obscurity to what the images was uninviting.

The viewers' wide range of reaction to these photographs was the most inspiring aspect of all three walk-throughs. Some were drawn into the aesthetics and some were repelled by the uncertainty. Eliciting these two very differ-

ent reactions was what was missing in the other work. I had now dealt with beauty, abstraction, repulsion and installation. However, they were not completely connected. After reflecting on the last few years, themes, which have been recurring through out the different bodies of artwork, became evident. Themes of beauty, abstraction, dimension and the biological became the foundations to a body of work.

## BEAUTY

“Beauty is almost never felt to be universal; it is almost always a product of experience. The judgement of beauty is not free of interest; it is laden with interest.<sup>3</sup>” Beauty is a complex conception in art, it is important to acknowledge that there are two canons of beauty. There is the attractive image that confirms what we already believe to be beautiful and there is the beautiful image that contains some sort of discomfort. Signifiers of beauty are connected by context, giving pleasure according to taste. There is a universal comfort, a visual pleasure that occurs in the viewer when traditional beauty is seen, which may empower everyone. However, when dealing with the other canon of beauty, the universal pleasure is challenged by the pursuit of another level of meaning, and this transgressive beauty only empowers a few.

It is easy to see the ugliness in the world but it takes strength to see the beauty. In reading the paper or listening to news there is little doubt that there is ugliness in society. A trip to Ireland to study politics in an international program called *Peace and Conflict* not only increased my awareness of a new culture but also influenced a way of understanding life. The main focus of the trip was learning the history of conflict in Northern Ireland. Books can not give a true sense of what it felt like to the people of this county. Only through interaction with the people did I begin to get a sense of what it felt like to live in a time of war. Through this interaction with the people of Ireland I also gained an understanding of a unique kind of beauty.

I found it difficult to comprehend how a young woman in Derry, Northern Ireland, who had seen her father beaten to death by the British RUC in her own home, could see beauty in the simplest of things— beauty that was right in front of her at all times just waiting to be defined. It was hard to understand what the Irish people had been through. Most of all it was amazing to feel the positive attitudes of the people who had experienced such traumatic events in their

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<sup>3</sup> Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremy. *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*. New York: Allworth Press, 1999.



lives. I saw that through their response to pain, we have to find some beauty that surrounds us every day because without it we could only despair. Independent research, on the Northern Ireland artists, who created work that dealt with the conflict, emphasized the passion the artists had towards their work. They would channel their emotions about the conflict into their work. I understood that for these artists creating artwork was not only a way to personally deal with and express emotions about the conflict, but also to help their culture to see another way of reacting to the Troubles instead of continual war. Upon my return to the states I was determined to keep this new outlook by finding a way to express beauty and pain within the artwork I was producing. I was able to keep this positive attitude and channel it through my art. Ireland was where I learned to see the appreciation of beauty in response to feelings of suffering.

Recently, an acceptance of aesthetics and beauty has returned to the art world. Artists and students are attempting to develop a broader understanding of the term “aesthetic”. Immanuel Kant, a philosopher most well known for his essay on the standard of judgement was interested in exploring the idea of aesthetics, beauty and the sublime. Kant uses the term “aesthetic” to refer to the “A priori experience”<sup>4</sup> and a standard of judgement based on “taste”.<sup>5</sup> Taste is defined by a culture, like the ideal Greek figure or the modern figure in today’s magazines. Living in a culture that is so saturated by the media it is hard to believe that there could possibly be a universal standard of judgement in regard to beauty. We may not always agree with these ideals however, there is a universal judgement or voice keeping ideals in the public eye, declaring them beautiful and leading us to believe they are true. In accepting this universal judgement we do not need to make moral decisions on what constitutes a beautiful object; we just know. Are we forming our own personal ideal? Is the media conditioning us? Beauty has always been closely associated with the perfect form, however, through cultural changes we no longer know what perfect form may be.

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<sup>4</sup> A priori knowledge; is knowledge acquired by the mind or reasoning alone, without any specific basis in experience.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 1790.

There are times when a viewer may not question why they believe an object to be beautiful. It's seen as universal, disconnected from morals or experiences, the aesthetics create a pleasurable feeling. A sunset for example, is beautiful it causes a pleasurable response; it's based on observation, not opinion or theory. For me this definition of beauty has no substance, it leaves the viewer feeling pleasure it is only sensory stimulation. Throughout any period in the history of art, you can see there has been a shift in defining the public perception of beauty.

For instance, beginning with the classical form of beauty, aesthetics were physically manifested with that of Greek ideals, images where on the grand scale and body was rendered as idealized forms. More recently, the industrial revolution brought a shift in aesthetics. Objects and images manifested the ideals of speed, dynamism and velocity. The machine became the perfect form; artists were interested in aestheticizing the apparatus to create a sense of beauty. Society, seeing the machine as less threatening viewed it as a good and strong tool, as well as a symbol of progress. Artists then began to depict images that had a social and political aesthetic in comparison to that of classical aesthetics. "Today beauty might be praised as a concept that acknowledges regular shifts in cultural perception."<sup>6</sup>

It is impossible to divorce societal influence on the definition of beauty. Beauty and aesthetics in art concern the relationship between the individual and the artwork. From this perspective the aesthetics is engaging the intellect of the viewer. In contemporary art "the field of aesthetics has significantly broadened to encompass more than subjective experience of, or feeling for, beauty to embrace everything considered in the philosophy of art, including the object of art, the artist and the spectator."<sup>7</sup>

The underlying idea is that beauty elevates the viewer. "The experience of beauty as an unfolding cognitive operation in which we are first drawn in and made receptive by the sensory pleasure of beauty, and then confronted with the

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<sup>6</sup> Benezra, Neal, Olga M. Viso. *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*. Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Smithsonian Institution, 1999.a, p.36.

<sup>7</sup> Benezra, p.88.



presence of a radically different subjectivity. Thus artwork is an expression of the artist's own moral and political construction of the visual world that he communicated to the viewer through techniques of beauty that excited visual pleasure."<sup>8</sup> This elevation mixed with a sensory stimulation is a new kind of beauty, which has become part of a visual artists challenge. According to Kant, images or objects that produce a feeling of pleasure which is separate from subjective experience and objective judgement can be declared as beautiful. He also believes that what we know and what we morally approve or disapprove of matters very little where beauty is concerned. Again, this idea of judgement of taste is something that is free of thought. The object that causes the viewer a pleasurable experience then can be called beautiful regardless of what that object's use may be.

By moving away from the object towards a concept, artists have created alternative forms of beauty in which abstraction, the quest for the sublime and interest in the reactions of the viewers have become the important aspect in creating art. Through stimulation of the senses the viewer becomes more connected and more interested in the image. "Pleasure (or pain) is not an objective feature of an object, it is a subjective feature induced by how those objects effect us."<sup>9</sup> The term "transgressive"<sup>10</sup> beauty has been used to combine these ideas of attraction and repulsion. This type of beauty has been seen in contemporary work, ranging from Picasso to Damien Hirst. For example Picasso's deconstruction of the female body has been critiqued in different ways. The distortions and disfigurement of the figures can be seen as violent but through his use of technique and color the images have a sense of appeal. He abandoned the classical concept of the female body and began to create new forms that were both challenging, yet realistic. Awareness of work dealing with this kind of beauty, where the object becomes less important than the thoughts and attitude of the viewer is an important concept in contemporary art work<sup>11</sup>. In transgressive

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<sup>8</sup> Kester, Grant H. "Learning from aesthetics: Old Masters and new lessons." *Art Journal*, 20-25. 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Benezra, p.190.

<sup>10</sup> The term transgressive is used in connection with this type of representation of beauty, some innate laws are being broken. The "universal" taste of aesthetics is being challenged.

<sup>11</sup> I do believe that this idea of beauty has grounding in the postmodern dialectic. Artists are in search of a means to express a new kind of beauty that may challenge "classical" perception. This is not to say that there are not elements of the classical aesthetic but the *idea* to which the beauty is bound to has a much stronger purpose

art, aesthetics are used to create a sense of beauty in an object of unpleasantness. Something is beautiful because it has a certain characteristic that we can identify as useful but the object itself is useless. When viewing a piece of work, the visual pleasure a viewer experiences is a feeling of which they may not approve, but can not resist. This occurs because of the way the images are perceived or because of the aesthetic chosen in creating the image.



## ABSTRACTION AND COLOR

Abstraction provides a new way of perceiving familiar objects. I use it as a tool to shift the viewers' attention away from the physical object photographed, to their own perceptual process. Because the photograph is seen as a documentation of something real the audience is more curious about the subject of the image. In making abstract photographs I am creating content which leads the viewer to one interpretation. Through the interplay of abstraction and color, objects once recognizable assume a new existence. The photographs I have made are images that feel as though they are biological examinations of things existing outside reality, while at the same time explore the elusiveness of beauty through color and form. Photographs that are nonrepresentational create a biological sense. By choosing colors that represent the internal body, or using abstract forms that suggest the body, I create photographs that guide the viewers interpretation. My approach to image making is to have my audience take notice of their altering perception<sup>12</sup>; taking part in a new experience of familiar objects.

I choose specific objects, which have the shapes, textures, and colors I desire in the final images. Water, light, mold, hair and fabric were the only materials used in the two-dimensional work. Water, a source of life, could easily be manipulated in any container creating abstraction. Light suggests meditation, reflection, beauty and mortality. Mold added elements of new growth and experimentation. Hair was connected to life, living and dead, precious and discarded compulsive and obsessive. Fabric was then used as an aid in introducing color. By photographing these objects, more control over the final image was achieved than when photographing the television, because they could be manipulated by hand when working with the props for the camera. I arranged models then began to examine them through the lens of my camera. Using the camera as my tool for abstraction, I manipulated the subjects so that, through imagination, a new biological world existed.

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<sup>12</sup> *The World Book Dictionary*. Perception- a complex method of obtaining information about our surrounding world, specifically through our senses, and apprehending this information as belief.

Photographs and three-dimensional forms were created to cause unease in the viewer in the presence of the object, while questioning the source of information, the viewer also was seduced by the aesthetics of the image. The images effect the viewer viscerally through sensory stimulation. Using photographs that contain simple and undefinable forms, I left the viewer to create their own personal interpretation of the photograph. After the sculptures and photographs are created, the installation and presentation became a key roll in leading the viewer towards a new perception

## INSTALLATION

The material objects, which I used as my subjects, form just one aspect of my investigation. I then use presentation, which further enhances the perceived connection to the biological. By using installation and particular methods of display the photographs guide the viewer in their interpretation. When creating the thesis installation I was very conscious of heightening the connection to the biological. The dark hallway that led into the main room acted as a tunnel into the experiment. The images lit below had been encased for preservation. In the cabinet pieces I chose to display the images with light behind them to connect to x-rays or a microscope. The images were mounted between Plexiglas to reference a microscope slide or to look as if they are encased for future study. The presentation of the specimen vitrines in their own room allowed the viewer to get close *but not too close* where the sculptures could be disturbed. This room created a sense of quarantine, there was no door, the objects were there to be observed. By presenting the images in a way that emphasizes the biological notion, the work directs and limits the viewers' possibility for interpretation.



## DIMENSIONS

Inspired and influenced by artist Eva Hesse, a painter and sculptor. “An innovator influenced by Minimalism, Surrealism and Conceptualism, she became known for her sculpture, molding latex into drapery-like sheets and three-dimensional shapes, dipping aluminum-screen armature into fiberglass resin, pioneering new materials and processes in a search for “non-art” art.” The critics were impressed but mystified. “Her works are questions rather than answers,” the Village Voice wrote. “They are bundles of eccentric contradictions.... Eva Hesse is an important new artist.”<sup>13</sup> Hesse used different materials to create forms that hinted at the body, yet visually dealt with form and repetition. In reading about Hesse, I found her work ethic was mostly intuitive, always struggling with where to go with the next piece. Hesse’s use of material, subject matter as well as and her commitment to making art were strong influences on choices I have made in creating visual artwork.

The most interesting element of Hesse’s work is that she was able to create three-dimensional drawings in which she made the drawings enter into a

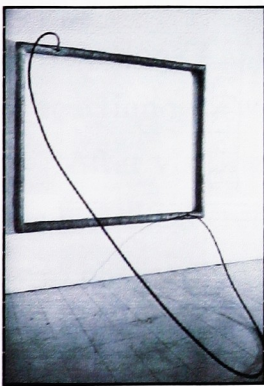


fig.31

three-dimensional space without losing the element of drawing. Hesse did a lot of sketching, not only 2D sketching but 3D sketching, by doing this she began to connect both dimensions. “The mid-career works reveal how Hesse began to break out of the frame-and, in

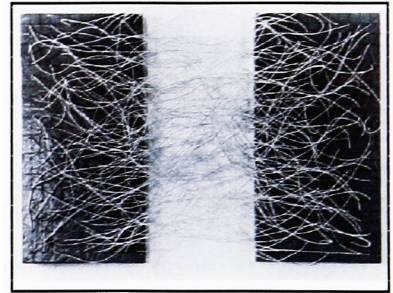


fig. 32

fact, “Hang Up” (1966) literally shows just that, with a long, loopy cable distended from two parts of an oversized frame.”<sup>14</sup> I feel the work contains beauty from the use of material and the simplicity of the objects, which overtake the viewer.

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<sup>13</sup> Chang, Scarlet. “Fragile Work, Fragile Life.” Los Angeles Times. February 17th 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Chang.

## BIOLOGICAL

My inspiration is drawn from a wide variety of sources including scientific, imaginary and fictional worlds drawn from my experiences and fantasies. My work is the combination of these worlds to create ambiguous forms that require the viewer to ask questions. By blurring the distinctions between the familiar and the unknown and by emphasizing the biomedical forms, I work to disturb initial assumptions and engage the subconscious.

The Mutter Museum in Philadelphia elicited a strong reaction in me when I visited. Dr. Mutters' collection of bones, wet specimens, plaster casts, wax and paper maiche models, dried preparation and medical illustrations as well as obsolete medical instruments was an examination into medical monstrosities. The display of the collection illustrated the fact that the museums' purpose lay not in the decorative display of selected artifacts, but in the organized grouping of teaching materials, displayed to help us rationalize our interest in them. The collection was first used as a library for students to learn about different medical abnormalities. Now the museum is open to anyone with a curiosity of either medicine or human anatomy. Creepy, gross, cool and morbid were emotions I felt when looking through the installation at the museum and this reaction was what I wanted viewers to feel when looking at my work.

After visiting this museum I began to create images that were interpreted as biological creations. Later, I thought that it would be interesting to learn how to photograph real biological specimens. To improve my ability to take these kind of images, I took a macro photography class in the bio-medical department at RIT. In macro photography powerful lenses are used to magnify subjects through the camera. The class taught me about shooting with a large format camera and I increased my conscious of light, composition, and focus. I was also exposed to a use of photography outside a "fine art" context. The students in this class were not making photographs to hang in a gallery they were

making photographs to be displayed in a science textbook. The biomedical photographers were trying to capture accurate information about a subject and they were trying to create aesthetically beautiful images. and they were trying to create aesthetically beautiful images.

Having what my mom has titled precious body syndrome, or PBS, the idea of medicine and the body is always part of my consciousness. I have always been highly observant to abnormalities, pains and affliction. She has memories of me when I was young. I would come to her to ask what a dark spot was on my arm, "a freckle," she said, "and I am sure that it was there yesterday." In feeling overly conscious of the amount of radio, Internet, newspaper and television commercials for prescription drugs, it seems as if we all could be suffering from everything. There now seems to be a drug for every generic symptom; anxiety, high blood pressure, sexual dysfunction, hair loss, depression, acid reflux. We can hardly escape the daily news coverage of scientific and medical research: stem cell, AIDS, cloning, cancer, heart disease, obesity and depression. All are influences of living in today's society. I am fascinated with science, nervous about the power of technology and medicine and often feel overwhelmed. Nature should not be played with most of the time the results are ugly and irreversible. Regardless, our species continues to poke and experiment and will never be satisfied until the all secrets that define us are finally revealed.



## CONCLUSION

Medical and biological references cannot be avoided when describing my work. I create a biological world out of objects that have no scientific connection. They become personal experiments with abstraction and beauty; experiments that write a new story of life and existence. Interested in constructing images that deal with aesthetics, comfort and repulsion, I create forms that sit oddly in the world, hovering between reality and fiction.



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